

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
February 20, 2009
Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Budget

Good evening, distinguished Chairs and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Kathleen Donlon and I live in New London, CT. I have been my brother's conservator and primary caregiver for the last decade. I am here today to speak on behalf of my brother, Steven Donlon regarding the closing of Cedarcrest Hospital.

Steven was inducted in 1980 into the Unification Church, a cult run by the Rev. Sun Young Moon, where he endured mental trauma and mind control until he was forcibly rescued by my family and deprogrammed by professionals. After this Steve was hospitalized on several occasions for psychiatric issues including a stay at Norwich State Hospital, which as you probably know, is now closed.

When Steven was 27, he was diagnosed with schizoid-affective disorder. In the last 20 years, Steve has been admitted on 12 separate occasions to Cedarcrest Hospital.

In the last 5 years, in addition to Cedarcrest, Steven has also lived at Bidwell and Westside convalescent homes, Mystic River Group Home, Manchester Memorial Hospital, Lawrence and Memorial Hospital, Natchaug Hospital, and currently lives in the locked Psychiatric Unit at Wintonbury Convalescent Home in Bloomfield, CT.

In 2005, Steve was admitted to Manchester Memorial Hospital from Westside Convalescent Home with induced psychosis. During the three months he was there, his condition became progressively worse, and at one point he was on 17 different medications.

At this point, I would have been completely out of treatment options for Steven, if Cedarcrest had not been available. It was still difficult to get him admitted into Cedarcrest, and I needed the help of Manchester Hospital's president, State Representative Ryan Berry, and Cedarcrest's psychiatrist Dr. Peirro to do so.

At Cedarcrest, over the next several months, with the help and care of Dr. Pierro, the neurologist, and other psychiatrists, Steven recovered from the damage done by multiple medications and eventually achieved a very healthy baseline and was able to return to the community. Dr. Pierro and others listened to Steven and myself, and worked to get him on the right medications and dosages. At Cedarcrest, Steve received *treatment* through the collaboration of the doctors and a real attempt to see what worked best for him.

If I had not had the option of sending Steve to Cedarcrest, I don't know what I would have done, since beds for this type of treatment are very hard to find. As it was, I had to enlist lots of help just to get Steve admitted there. I don't know of any other facility where it would be possible for Steve to receive this type of care when he is in crisis.

I believe that the lack of investment in community based services and housing, small hospitals, and group homes have led them to often fail those with the most severe mental illnesses. In all of these settings, psychiatric care is minimal, sometimes a brief visit once a week, if at all.

Psychiatrists often don't have the time to attend care meetings or even discuss treatment with family members.

My brother has had a difficult life which has been much improved by his treatment at Cedarcrest Hospital. Because of the nature of his severe illness and the level of care provided to him in other facilities, it is likely that he will again need the type of treatment that only a facility like Cedarcrest can provide. Without a quality and adequate community based mental health system, it is critical that the state maintain this option.

While community housing and convalescent homes can provide interim care, they are not really equipped to deal with someone like Steve when he is in crisis. Steven deserves to get the treatment he needs to improve the quality of his life and I believe the closing of Cedarcrest would deprive him of that opportunity. Please consider the needs of my brother and others like him. Please do not remove any dollars or capacity from a system that is already starving.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you